

THE MAN WITH THE IRON MASK.

AMONG the many romances which contributed, more than any real historical merit, to the vogue of Voltaire's "Age of Louis XIV.," one of the most famous is that of the Man with the Iron Mask. But in 1745, seven years before the publication of the cynic's much-vaunted travesty on the history of a great period, there had appeared at Amsterdam a fantastic description of the court of France, in which, under imaginary names, were represented the chief celebrities of that brilliant galaxy, a gloomy prominence being given to the mysterious man of the hidden face. This work, styled "Secret Memoirs in Illustration of the History of Persia," had been issued anonymously; but there are not wanting arguments to show that Voltaire, jealous of the fame accruing to Montesquieu from his "Persian Letters," was its author. Be this as it may, the Sage of Ferney adopted the clandestine writer's version of the story which then, and for many years afterward, agitated the curious throughout Europe. In his first edition of the "Age of Louis XIV." (two volumes in 12mo), Voltaire gave no details concerning the Iron Mask; but in the enlarged editions, issued in and after 1753, he spoke more explicitly than any other writer had hitherto done, even drawing the portrait of the victim,

describing his mask with hinges at the mouth, and assigning the date of his first imprisonment and of his death.

According to the fantastic "Persian Memoirs," Shah Abas (Louis XIV.) had two sons: one legitimate, named Sephi Mirza (Louis, dauphin of France); and one illegitimate, Giafer (Count de Vermandois, by Mlle. de la Vallière). These two princes hated each other, and one day Giafer struck his brother in the face. Shah Abas informed his council of this outrage, which, according to the Persian law, was punishable with death; but it was resolved to send Giafer to the army, then acting on the frontiers of Feldran (Flandre), and to represent him as killed; then he was to be secretly transferred to the citadel of the island of Ormus (Isles Sainte-Marguerite), and there perpetually confined. Only one of Giafer's servants was intrusted with this state secret, and he was killed by the escort during the journey to Ormus. The commander of Ormus treated his prisoner with great respect, himself bringing his meals and waiting at his table, and no other person was ever allowed to see his face. One day the prince scratched his name on a plate, and when the dish was handed to the commander by the slave who had observed the writing, the unfortunate discoverer was put to death. After many years of confinement at Ormus, the prisoner was transported to the citadel of Ispahan (the Bastille, remaining in charge of the same commander, now promoted to the governorship of the latter fortress. Throughout

his entire imprisonment, which lasted until his death, Giafer was forced to wear a mask whenever sickness or any other important reason compelled him to be seen by others than his jailer. Such persons reported that the governor always treated his mysterious charge with scrupulous respect, and that the prisoner showed great familiarity with the commander, always addressing him as "thou." The author of the "Persian Memoirs" represents Giafer as yet living in 1723; for he states that Ali-Homajou (the Duke of Orleans) died shortly after a visit to the prince, and we know that Orleans died in 1723, eight years after the death of Louis XIV.

Such, then, is the substance of all the legends concerning the Iron Mask, which have appeared from the "Persian Memoirs" to the famous novel of the elder Dumas. Louis XV. once said, when pressed, as he often was concerning this strange episode in the reign of the grand monarch: "Let people dispute about it; as yet no one has told the truth concerning it." And once, in a moment of confidence, he said to Laborde, his first *valet de chambre*: "You wish me to tell you something about the Iron Mask? Well, this much more than any one else you may learn: the imprisonment of that unfortunate hurt no one but himself."

For many years seven theories were presented as to the identity of this personage. Various investigators or romancists discerned him in the Count de Vermandois, a natural son of Louis XIV. by Mlle. de La Vallière; in a son of Anne of Austria by De

Richelieu; in the Duke of Beaufort, high-admiral of France, confined, it is supposed, lest he might have interfered with the projects of Colbert, then Minister of Marine; in Arwedicks, schismatic patriarch, captured and imprisoned, it was said, at the instigation of the Jesuits; in the Duke of Monmouth, not executed therefore by James II.; in Henry Cromwell, second son of the Protector; and finally in Mattioli, secretary of the Duke of Mantua, whose political influence Louis XIV. feared. Let us briefly examine the arguments adduced for each of these parties.

The theory that the Count de Vermandois was the Man with the Iron Mask was patronized not only by Voltaire, but by Griffet,* a Jesuit writer who had been confessor at the Bastille for nine years, and had enjoyed exceptional advantages as an investigator of this question. He cites the manuscript Journal of Dujanca, governor of the Bastille in 1698, and the mortuary registers of the parish of St. Paul in Paris; and from these documents he proves that the masked prisoner arrived at the Bastille from Pignerol on September 18, 1698, and that he died on November 19, 1703. He leans toward the supposition that the prisoner was Vermandois,† merely because the date of the pre-

* "Traité des différentes sortes de preuves qui servent à établir la vérité dans l'histoire." Liège, 1769.

† Griffet does not wish "to come to a decision," because of his uncertainty as to the date of the prisoner's arrival at Pignerol. In his day this date was unknown, but it is now certain that it was previous to September, 1681.

sumed death of that prince on the Flemish frontier coincides with the one which he fixes for the commencement of the masked person's captivity,—that is, 1683. But Griffet gives no reason for assigning this year rather than the one preferred by Voltaire, 1661; or rather than 1669, the one adopted by Lagrange Chancel;* or rather than 1685, the one selected by Saint-Foix.†

However, Griffet was refuted by Saint-Foix, who found proof in the registers of the cathedral chapter of Arras, that Louis XIV. had buried his son in the vault of Elizabeth de Vermandois (wife of Philippe d'Alsace, Count of France), who died in 1182; while the registers of St. Paul's state that the masked prisoner was interred in the cemetery of that parish. The registers of the chapter of Arras show that great respect was paid to the remains of Vermandois, whereas M. de Palteau, a descendant of Saint-Mars (the custodian of our prisoner), informed Saint-Foix that it was a tradition in his family that chemicals had been placed in the coffin of the unknown, for the quicker destruction of the body.‡ And, what is more conclusive of all, there exists a letter of Barbezieux to Saint-Mars, written on August 13, 1691, in which the masked individual is described as having been already in the officer's custody "for twenty years;" whereas it is certain that the Count de Vermandois

* "*Année Littéraire.*" Paris, 1758.

† *Idem*, 1768.

‡ *Ib.*

died, or (according to Voltaire and Griffet) disappeared, as lately as 1683.*

As to the theory that the mysterious personage was an illegitimate† son of Anne of Austria, Queen of Louis XIII., by the Cardinal de Richelieu, there is no need to soil these pages with any detailed refutation. Elsewhere we have dwelt at some length on the character of the great statesman, and conclusively shown that no valid charges have been brought against his morality; while as to the inculpated Queen, not one argument has ever been adduced to prove either her guilt in this particular case, or any departure whatever from conjugal duty. One observation alone will suffice to relegate the present charge to oblivion. On November 17, 1697, Barbezieux wrote to Saint-Mars that he should “never inform any person whomsoever as to what the prisoner *had done*.” He would not have used such language, had the only fault of the masked one been that of his birth.

In 1758, M. Lagrange-Chancel, who had been confined in the citadel of Sainte-Marguerite in 1718, and who had collected there much traditionary evi-

* Mlle. de Montpensier, a well-informed contemporary, narrates that the prince arrived at the camp before Courtray in the beginning of November, 1683; that on the 12th he was attacked by fever, and died on the 19th.

† Some have made the Iron Mask a legitimate son of the Queen. Thus, in 1790, Soulavie published an account of two shepherds announcing to Louis XIII. that Anne would give birth to twins, whose rivalry would cause great harm to France; and he added that Louis imprisoned the second son.

dence concerning the masked prisoner detained in the citadel not many years before, published a refutation of the lies and errors in the "Age of Louis XIV.;" and among other things bearing on the Iron Mask, declared that M. de Lamotte-Guérin, governor of the Isles, had assured him that the prisoner was the Duke of Beaufort, admiral of France, generally supposed to have been killed at Candia, but confined by Colbert as a precautionary measure. But, as Griffet observed, Beaufort was incapable of interfering with the projects of Colbert for the good of his country; and even had he been so disposed, he had not the power, since his functions were limited to those of "grand master, and superintendent of navigation and commerce," the post of high-admiral having been suppressed by Richelieu. And modern historians are well satisfied that Beaufort was killed at Candia.

In 1825 M. de Taules published a pamphlet in which he accused the Jesuits of having caused the abduction and imprisonment, first at the Isles Sainte-Marguerite, and then in the Bastille, of Arwedicks, a schismatic patriarch, who was, he says, "a mortal enemy of our religion, and a cruel persecutor of the Armenian Catholics." De Taules identified Arwedicks with the Iron Mask, and says that he died in the Bastille.* But documents in the Foreign Office

* "L'Homme au Masque de Fer, mémoire historique où l'on réfute les différentes opinions relatives à ce personnage mystérieux et où l'on démontre que ce prisonnier fut une des victimes des Jésuites."

at Paris prove that Arwedicks was removed from Turkey, "during the embassy of M. Feriol at Constantinople,"* which began in 1699. Now, Saint-Mars brought his masked prisoner to the Bastille in 1698, and he had already been in captivity many years. Again, Arwedicks joined the Roman communion, was liberated, and died in freedom.†

The theory of Saint-Foix, identifying the mask with the Duke of Monmouth, a natural son of Charles II., decapitated for repeated rebellions, on July 15, 1685, obtained great favor among lovers of the marvellous. But how could a substitution have been effected successfully in the case of one condemned to public execution, and whose appearance was so familiar to the officers and guards of the Tower, and to the whole people of London? Again, granting this to have been possible, would not the existence of Monmouth, in French custody, have transpired after the English revolution of 1688? But the letter of Barbezieux to Saint-Mars in 1691, speaking of the latter officer's prisoner as having been already in his custody for twenty years, destroys the hypothesis of Saint-Foix.

As to Henry Cromwell, second son of the Protector, there is not a shadow of probability in favor of his having been the mysterious prisoner. Why

* "Mémoire manuscrit de M. de Bonac, ambassadeur de France à Constantinople, 1724."

† Thus says the official report of his death in the archives of the Foreign Office.

should the French Government have disturbed his repose, while allowing his brother Richard, the quondam successor of Oliver, perfect freedom in France?

Nor can Mattioli, secretary of the Duke of Mantua, have been the disputed individual; for he certainly died in 1681. Again, all authors agree in accepting the abundant and indisputable evidence that the famous prisoner was always treated with the greatest respect compatible with his isolation from the outside world, while the correspondence of the royal ministers and officers concerning Mattioli, is redolent of contempt for that person. Thus Catinat writes to Louvois about "that knave;" and Louvois admires the patience of Saint-Mars in not treating "that rogue as he merits, when he is wanting in respect to the governor."

Who, then, was this man with the Iron Mask? Very strong, if not most conclusive, arguments are adduced by M. Paul Lacroix in his apposite work, and strengthened by Barthélemy, to show that he was no other than the celebrated Fouquet, superintendent of finance under Louis XIV., who was condemned in 1664 to perpetual imprisonment for malfeasance in office, peculation, and projected high-treason.

Firstly, the precautions taken in guarding Fouquet, while at Pignerol, were very like those used in regard to the masked prisoner of Sainte-Marguerite and the Bastille. When the Chamber of Justice had condemned Fouquet to perpetual exile, the King, we

read in the "Défenses de M. Fouquet," judging that there "was great danger in allowing the said Fouquet to leave the kingdom, because of his intimate knowledge of many affairs of state," deemed it prudent to change the punishment to perpetual imprisonment. The culprit was placed in a carriage with four guards, and in custody of M. de Saint-Mars, and escorted by one hundred musketeers, was conducted to the castle of Pignerol. His physician and valet were subjected to the same confinement as their master, "lest they might be a means of communication between him and his friends." And in the "Instruction" given to Saint-Mars for his guidance in the care of Fouquet, which paper was signed by Louis XIV., he is forbidden to allow Fouquet to have any communication with any living person other than Saint-Mars himself, "either by speech, writing, or visit;" and the culprit must never leave his apartment, "even for a walk." Saint-Mars can furnish him with books, but "only one at a time; and he must carefully examine each book when he removes it, lest any writing or cipher be therein hidden." The prisoner, of course, was to have no paper, ink, etc. He could have a confessor when he so desired; but "the priest must be notified only the moment before hearing the said Fouquet, and he must always have a different confessor." And Saint-Mars was to "keep his Majesty informed as to what the prisoner did." Now, all these exceptional precautions, and those indicated in the numerous letters of Louvois to Saint-Mars, exactly corres-

pond with those adopted in the case of the Iron Mask.

Secondly, most of the traditions concerning this individual can easily be accommodated to Fouquet. Take, for instance, that of the plate with writing scratched on it, flung from a window and found by a slave. According to Papon,* who heard this from the son of one of the guards of the mask, it was not a plate, but a shirt, on which the prisoner had written "from one end to the other." Now, this story reminds us of two passages concerning Fouquet in letters from Louvois to Saint-Mars—"I have received your letter, as well as the napkin on which M. Fouquet wrote;" and, "You may tell him that if he turns his table linen into writing-paper, he need not be surprised if you give him no more." Again, all the tokens of respect, the many courtesies of refinement, the elegant furniture, etc., accorded to the mysterious man of Sainte-Marguerite and the Bastille were extended to Fouquet at Pignerol.

Thirdly, it is far from certain that Fouquet died in 1680, as was reported. The contradictions of his contemporaries on this subject are strange, and there is an almost entire absence of documentary evidence.

Fourthly, political reasons might have easily induced Louis XIV. to cause the spread of a report of the death of Fouquet. It has been the

* "Voyage en Provence."

fashion among most modern historians to sympathize with, if not to laud, Fouquet as much as they have decried his successor, Colbert. The modern "liberal" school could not be expected to see willingly any good in him who was bequeathed to his sovereign by the dying Mazarin, any more than they do in the latter, recommended as his own successor by the moribund Richelieu. But an inspection of the report of Fouquet's trial must satisfy any impartial mind that the famous superintendent merited the extreme displeasure of Louis XIV. as a reckless prodigal of the public money, and an arch-conspirator against the crown.

Another reason for the monarch's aversion is sometimes found in the supposed audacity of Fouquet in pretending to rival Louis in the affections of Mlle. de La Vallière; but that view of the character of the grand monarch, which ever espies the lover behind the king, is essentially absurd. One need only read that criminating document, written entirely by the hand of Fouquet, and found hidden at the back of a mirror in his apartment, to become convinced of his transcendent guilt. "In reading this paper," says the impartial Peter Clement,* "one can not tell whether he should be more astonished at the extraordinary levity of the writer, or at his seemingly ingenuous confidence in the devotion to himself of those men

* "Histoire de Colbert."

whom he had deluged in money, or at the crazy notion he had conceived as to his own importance in the state. . . . In every line is evidence of his malfeasance, of his abuse of the public treasury in order to attach creatures to himself to the injury of the state, and of his programme of civil war.”* In consigning Fouquet to perpetual imprisonment, Louis XIV. executed a judicious stroke of statesmanship; and if, as we suppose, he gave out that the still influential criminal had died, he deprived the opposition cliques of their most powerful pretext.

Fifthly, Saint-Mars and Louvois, whenever writing about Fouquet before the date of his alleged death, always use the same significant phrase, “my”

* Among the papers of Fouquet was found the following document: “I promise to give my loyalty to Monseigneur the Procurator-General, Superintendent of Finances, and Minister of State; to belong to no person but himself, giving myself and attaching myself to him with my utmost zeal, and promising to serve him in all things, *against every person without exception*; and to obey no person but him; and to hold no relations with any whom he may prohibit to me, and to resign the post of Concarneau, which he has given to me, whenever he may demand it. I promise to sacrifice my life for him, *against all whom he may name, be they of any quality or condition whatever, without excepting any person in the world.* As assurance of this I give these presents, written and signed by my hand. Done at Paris, June 2, 1658, Deslandes.” Deslandes was commander of the citadel of Concarneau, which belonged to Fouquet. But the document which ruined Fouquet was nothing less than a detailed plan of rebellion, addressed to his friends, and to be actuated in case Cardinal Mazarin, then become suspicious of Fouquet’s honesty, and designing to substitute Colbert in his place, should order his arrest.

or "your prisoner," although the former had many other prisoners in charge; and after the first apparition of the mask, both Louvois and Barbezieux adopt this phrase.

As to the death of the mysterious prisoner, we learn from the diary of M. Dujunca that it occurred on November 19, 1703, and that he was buried on November 20, in the cemetery of St. Paul's. The parochial register states that "on November 19, 1703, *Marchialy*, aged about forty-five years, died in the Bastille, and his body was interred in the cemetery of St. Paul's, his parish." *Marchialy* is the name by which tradition has nearly always described this personage, but why we can not discover. It is certain, however, that in those days, as in ours, prisoners were generally called by other names than their own, and that these pseudonyms were frequently changed, in the case of state offenders, to baffle the schemes of their friends.

When the Bastille fell into the hands of the raging mob, on July 14, 1789, search was made at once for some evidence as to the identity of the masked charge of Saint-Mars. A periodical of the day informs us that there was found a paper marked 61,389,000, and the words, "Fouquet,* coming from the Isles Sainte-Marguerite, with an iron mask." Then followed, X. X. X., and underneath, "Kersadion." When this discovery was made known, people recalled to mind a saying in the supplement to the "Age

* So the name was written in those days.

of Louis XIV.," to the effect that Chamillart, Minister of State, had said that the Iron Mask "was a man who possessed all the secrets of Fouquet." Unfortunately, however, for any prospect of certainty in the question we have been examining, the interesting paper just mentioned no longer exists.*

* Drawing attention to the contradictions of contemporaries concerning the death of Fouquet, and commenting on Louvois' acknowledgment, only on April 3, of Saint-Mars' letter of information, whereas Mme. de Sévigné knew of the event several days before, Paul Lacroix asks how the special despatches of the state were over fourteen days on the road, while the postal courier of Pignerol covered the route in less than eight days. And how can we explain the silence of the "*Mercure Galant*," a journal most precise in recording the principal deaths of every month? A strange death, says Lacroix, which occurred at Pignerol on March 23, and was known at Paris on the 25th. "And not an authentic document to establish the death of a man whose fortune and disgrace had caused such wonder! Nothing to impose silence on the rumors ever insinuating crime when death in a state-prison is mysterious! Only an enigmatical despatch of the Minister of War, the transmission of a coffin, and an extract from a convent register showing a burial a year afterward!" Is it not strange that Lafontaine, who could so plaintively lament the fall of "Oronte," had no regrets for his Mæcenæ? asks Barthélemy. And Gourville, who kept up a correspondence with his friend Fouquet to the very last, makes no mention of the time or place of his death. Even the family of Fouquet were uncertain as to his end. Nor can we forget that the diary of M. Dujunca informs us that "the olden prisoner whom Saint-Mars had guarded at Pignerol" was yet in that fortress at the end of August, 1681, when Saint-Mars passed as governor to Exiles, seventeen months after the presumed death of Fouquet, taking with him the Iron Mask and one other prisoner, whose name we ignore. Nor is it insignificant that whereas Louvois uses the phrase "the deceased M. Fouquet," when writing to Saint-Mars during the month after the alleged death, he ever after omits that qualification.